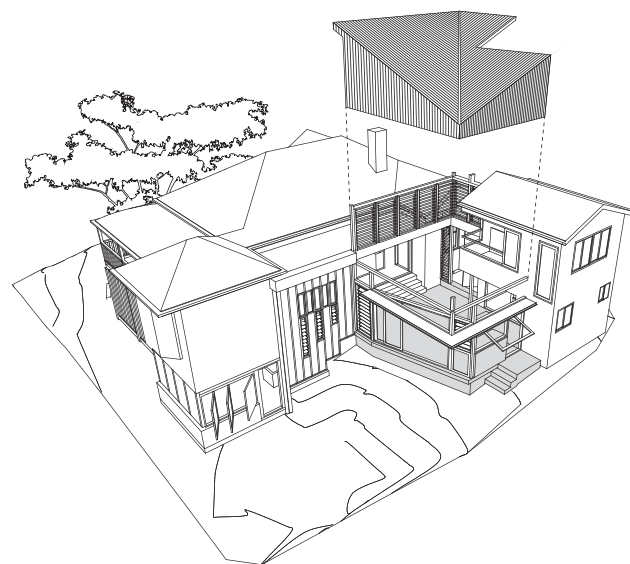


# *In-Between* ROOM by Phorm Architecture + Design

• BRISBANE, QLD •

At the home where singer/songwriter Grant McLennan of The Go-Betweens once lived, a new 'in-between' room forms a contemporary counterpoint to the original Queenslander.

Words by Michelle Bailey  
Photography by Christopher Frederick Jones



**Axonometric**



01 The addition's "in-between room" connects a previously detached existing tower with the existing house. Artwork: Keith Burt.





The lyrics of the song *Streets Of Your Town* by Brisbane band The Go-Betweens reminisce about the suburban character of Brisbane's streets. In this "town," streets are largely defined by the timber and tin vernacular housing, a legacy of a colonial past. These Queenslanders, cherished for their pyramid-shaped roofs, shaded verandahs and crafted ornamentation, are invariably found in a state of either decay or renovation.

This particular Queenslander, in Brisbane's Highgate Hill, has been reimagined by Phorm Architecture and Design, which carried out a series of alterations so that the house could meet the needs of a modern, growing family. Before these interventions, the building had closely resembled a photo of it that was taken in the 1930s, with the original homestead sitting proudly on a large piece of territory overlooking a now forgotten Gloucester Street railway station. Sometime later, a detached two-storey flat had been added at the rear corner of the garden, creating a curious pairing of a house and tower.

Positioned between the Queenslander and the tower, the new "in-between room" is an extension of the living space and a contemporary counterpoint to the historic house. The architect imagined the room as "exploded," that is with structure and form, but essentially open to and part of the landscape. Importantly, the

space provides a means to connect the tower structure to the house proper, giving it a new purpose and presence on the site.

The proposal relies on the removal of the two connecting structures' superfluous exteriors. The base of the tower is eroded to make an undercroft beneath the projecting mezzanine of the attic floor above. At the back of the house proper, openings are reassembled so that the living room can extend outside. The interruption to this interstitial space, made by the positive edges of both house and tower, concede a tension highlighted by old, white weatherboards juxtaposed against the new glass and timber walls now enclosing the space.

The "in-between" room takes its cues from the scale and geometry of both the Queenslander and the tower as a way to mediate the architecture of old and new. The inverted hip of the roof is the physical collision made by an imagined extension of the tower gable to a parallel stroke of the main roof. Underneath it, a plywood-clad ceiling reinforces the coming together of these two forms and strengthens the juncture at this point. A further complexity is added with a purposeful slice off an otherwise rectilinear plan. This angled cut steers the room toward a long view over the train line and to the east.



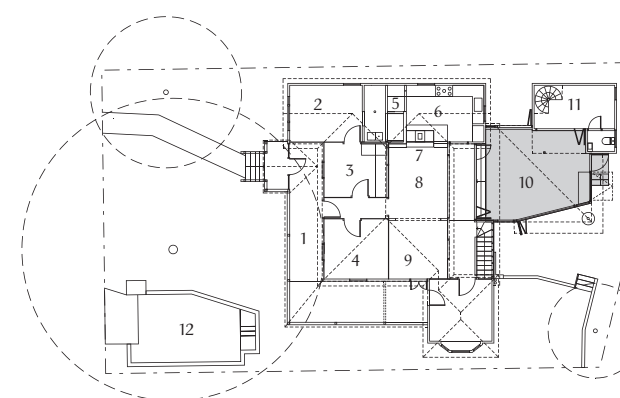
02 The new addition combines the geometries of its neighbours – the roof pitch seen here mirrors that of the original Queenslander.

03 Operable walls and louvres help to capture breezes.

04 While it has been modernized, the original house's period details have been retained.



Section 1:400



Plan 1:400



- 1 Verandah
- 2 Main bedroom
- 3 Anteroom
- 4 Bedroom
- 5 Pantry
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Fireplace
- 8 Sitting room
- 9 Lounge
- 10 In-between room
- 11 Library
- 12 Car space





05 An internal connection was made to a new bathroom and laundry underneath the dwelling.

06 The second floor of the tower can be opened up to the “in-between” room” below.



07 The street elevation of the Queenslander largely retains its original appearance.


While immediately informed by the built environment to which it anchors, the room is very much engaged with and defined by nature. Sunlight is captured and shaded expertly, with overhangs and sunhoods positioned to work best during the hottest parts of the day. Temperature is further moderated by the thermal mass of the concrete floor slab and by the breezes that are encouraged through operable walls and high-level louvres. A view to the deciduous tree outside is carefully framed so that it too can participate in the orchestration of light and shadow and become part of a seasonal soliloquy.

In addition to the “in-between room,” other modifications were made to refine the functioning of the house. An internal connection was made to a new bathroom and laundry under the dwelling. This was complementary to work that was undertaken in earlier stages to renovate the ensuite and kitchen. Other smaller edits, including the removal of an enclosed part of the verandah to let the formal sitting room open directly to the outside, completed the alterations.

For architect Paul Hotston, the most important contribution of the scheme is the retention of the tower and the space outside, and their transitioning to become a more usable and connected part

of the home. The significance of this place is attributed largely to Grant McLennan, singer-songwriter for The Go-Betweens, who once lived there. On the old terrace, Grant and his music partner Robert Forster played guitar together, unperturbed by the sound of trains passing at the back of the site. Such musings we know because they were recorded in a remembrance penned by Robert in 2006, after Grant unexpectedly passed away in his tower.

Chatting with me in the garden, Paul reflects on Grant’s music and The Go-Betweens – that they were great and he was a fan, but mostly that he believed the group was seminal for Brisbane in the 1980s. At a time when most people just wanted to escape it, these guys were proud of the city and their music spoke of this, he says.

This deep and idiosyncratic appreciation of a place can be recognized in Paul’s work, too. The extensive portfolio of projects completed by Phorm Architecture and Design in Brisbane and throughout regional Queensland is defined by an astute sensitivity toward, and connection with, place. That In-Between Room came across Paul’s desk and was imagined and realized so beautifully makes this tiny fragment of a “town,” where something special transpired, a fitting tribute to music and architecture. 

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**Practice profile**  
A practice that specializes in residential architecture, from semi-remote rural projects to inner-city reworkings.

**Project team**  
Paul Hotston, Jonathan Kopinski, Nick Tyson, Zsolt Kiss, Emma Denman

**Builder**  
TopMarc Constructions

**Consultants**  
**Engineer:** Optimum Structures  
**Lighting:** Caribou, Inlite

**Products**  
**Roofing:** Lysaght Trim-Dek in Zincalume; Air-Cell Retroschild  
**External walls:** Lysaght Trim-Dek in Zincalume; Lexan twinwall polycarbonate sheet  
**Internal walls:** Austral Plywoods A-grade hoop pine plywood  
**Windows:** Custom windows in New Guinea rosewood by Architectural Timber Joinery; Breezway clear anodized aluminium glass louvres; Aneeta glass frameless double hung awning; Centor hardware

**Doors:** Custom doors by Architectural Timber Joinery; custom stainless steel door by Phorm Architecture and Design and Everything Metal  
**Flooring:** Boral polished concrete slab in Ebonite finish; Comcork Flooring cork sheet in clear sealed taupe finish  
**Lighting:** Big Ass Fans Haiku ceiling fan; Inlite LED floodlight, down/up light  
**Kitchen:** Accent on Stone Pietra grey stone benchtop; custom copper hanging rack by Phorm Architecture and Design and Copperform; Everything Metal stainless steel benchtops and sinks; Classic Ceramics Santosa tiles; Formica laminate joinery in ‘Graphite’; Bosch dishwasher and rangehood; Lofra freestanding cooker

**Bathroom:** Alape WTPR wall basin with shelf; Mizu freestanding bath spout; Scala mixer; Nikles Stahl Techno Twin Waterrail showerheads; White Stone Hox Mini wall basin; Ideal Standard Tonic toilet suite

**Floor area**  
446 m<sup>2</sup> site  
271 m<sup>2</sup> floor (existing)  
88 m<sup>2</sup> floor (new)

**Project cost**  
\$400,000

**Time schedule**  
**Design, documentation:** 12 months  
**Construction:** 7.5 months



# The Wythes FAMILY HOME

• BRISBANE, QLD •



Phorm Architecture and Design has refreshed an original Queenslander and added a new “in-between” room that accommodates the needs of Biba and Fletcher Wythes’s growing family. Here we chat to Biba about her family’s experience of working with an architect.

Photography by Christopher Frederick Jones

## 01 Could you tell us a little about your family and your background?

We are a family of three – soon to be a family of four (since halfway through the renovation process!). My husband Fletcher and I have a four-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Amelia. Fletcher is originally from country New South Wales and I am from Brisbane; however, work and life have meant we have lived in a few places in Australia and travelled overseas when we could.

Fletcher is an officer in the Australian Army, which has been interesting during the renovation process – we signed the build contract during his two-week break from an Afghanistan deployment and we then started building while he was still in Afghanistan. I am a social media adviser for a government department and work in Brisbane city.

We have always lived fairly close to the city, and over time have gradually moved closer. In May 2012, after many years of both of us studying hard and working to get to where we wanted to be, we bought this house in Highgate Hill with a view to it being where Amelia would grow up – the house that we would settle into for our future.

## 02 Why did you engage an architect and how did you discover Phorm Architecture and Design?

It was an interesting path to commissioning Phorm – it was almost like it was fate. We had planned to renovate our previous house at Woolloongabba, but after talking to a number of builders and looking at the costs it just didn’t seem like we would get what we wanted at a fitting price.

When we bought our house at Highgate Hill the kitchen and ensuite had already been renovated by Phorm but the rest of the house was untouched. The previous owners had planned other renovations but not completed them, and we had renovation ideas of our own when we inspected the house.

We had always planned to approach an emerging architect friend of ours to renovate our house for us. We spoke to her about the potential plans and asked her about Phorm. She praised the practice and in fact knew one of its architects, and she made a call for us to find out more about the house and the existing renovation plans before we bought it at auction. That was when we first heard that the house was a part of Brisbane’s cultural history – the lead singer of The Go-Betweens had lived at the house and passed away there prior to the current owners purchasing it.

After buying the house, we researched Phorm’s work and then arranged to meet with them. When we walked into the meeting and saw a model of our future house on the table, we knew it was the house we wanted. The guys at Phorm were easy to talk to and relaxed but also very knowledgeable and in tune with areas that were important to us, including our need to stay on budget. It just all felt right.



03

### Is the result achieved by working with an architect what you expected?

This is the first time we have ever worked with an architect or conducted a major renovation. The result is what we expected, and I think that is due to the strong relationship we built with the architects and the fact that we had a very good idea of what we were getting and how it would work. The architects were obviously passionate about the build but also respectful of our needs and financial limitations. On that note, we were pleasantly surprised by the passion and personal pride that both the architects and builder had during every stage of the build – it gave us confidence in their ability and advice. While we were excited about every stage of the project, so were they. And that was a really nice surprise.



05

### Would you engage an architect again? Why/why not?

Yes. I would engage an architect again to stay on budget, to ensure what we want is what is delivered, and because architects have ideas and experience that we don't have. The architects at Phorm understood what we wanted, and then gave us what we wanted but to a much greater standard, which showed their professionalism.

Biba and Fletcher Wythes presented at the Our Houses event in Brisbane. Our Houses was supported through the Asia Pacific Design Library, State Library of Queensland – [designonline.org.au](http://designonline.org.au).

Presenter

Program partner

Supporting partner

**HOUSES**



04

### What advice would you give someone who is thinking of using an architect?

First and foremost, I would emphasize the importance of building an open and honest relationship with the architect so that you can understand where their influences are coming from, and so they can understand what you want and how you are going to live in the final “product,” so to speak. Doing this helps to build trust but also saves you time when communicating with the architect along the way.

I would also strongly consider having an architect manage the project through to completion. Yes, it does cost money, and we were quite budget-conscious in that we HAD to stay within our budget, but I really believe it would have cost us more not to do so. The architects are the ones who know what the project and all of its finer details should look like, and they are the ones who pick up and take charge when it's not going how it should. They have the knowledge, vested interest and skills to liaise with the builder about any changes that are needed along the way, rather than us making costly incorrect decisions. We believe the architects' knowledge, and the fact that we worked with them through to the project's completion, saved us time and money and improved the quality of our home.

